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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS WITH DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER  
CHIDCHAI TO DISCUSS THAI SOUTH; AVIAN INFLUENZA

Classified By: Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce for reason 1.4 (b)

1. (C) SUMMARY. On October 13, Ambassador Boyce paid a courtesy call on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Chidchai Vanasatidya. Chidchai was generally upbeat about the RTG's progress in addressing the Southern problem. He stated that the militants clearly wanted to provoke another major crackdown in order to shore up popular support for their cause. The RTG, he said, would not fall into that trap. Chidchai mentioned that there would be education reforms in the South in order to bring the teachings of pondok schools more in line with the national curriculum. He also criticized Malaysia for what he labeled an attempt to create an international incident over the fate of the 131 Thais who claim to be refugees. The Ambassador urged Thailand to cooperate with its poorer neighbors to address the threat posed by a potential avian flu pandemic in the region. END SUMMARY

2. (SBU) On October 13, Ambassador Boyce paid a courtesy call on Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Chidchai Vanasatidya. (NOTE: Chidchai previously served as Minister of the Interior from February until August 2005. END NOTE) The Ambassador began by asking DPM Chidchai about recent comments made by General Pallop Pinmanee, an administration hawk, in which he criticized the RTG for an ineffective and "weak" strategy towards the violence in the South. Chidchai replied that the General's comments had been made in a closed session of a workshop and that his comments had been leaked to the press. These comments represented only General Pallop's personal views.

MILITANTS WANT TO PROVOKE A LARGE-SCALE RESPONSE; CHIDCHAI SAYS RTG IS NOT TAKING THE BAIT

3. (SBU) Chidchai was generally upbeat about the RTG's recent progress in addressing the Southern problem. He stated that the Thais were getting better intelligence in the problematic "red zones" where insurgent activities were worst. Chidchai repeatedly noted that the "modus operandi" of the insurgents was to try to provoke a harsh response from the RTG. Such a crackdown would inevitably arouse the anger of the local population, who would become more sympathetic to the demands of the militants. Chidchai said that the RTG was being very careful not to fall into the militants' trap. Still, he admitted that there was enormous frustration with the brutality of the insurgent attacks, which continued to kill and maim officers and civilians every day, and to disrupt the lives of all the people of the region. Regarding cooperation from the local people, Chidchai felt that "all residents" know more than they are telling authorities.

4. (SBU) The Ambassador asked Chidchai about PM Thaksin's recent visit to the home of Mariya Useng, wife of a wanted Thai Malay separatist leader. Chidchai responded that the visit was made in large part to inspire confidence among the Thai population, who could see that their PM was not afraid to visit the South, and that he was willing to face the Southerners head-on by attempting to meet separatist leaders. The Ambassador noted that the Prime Minister's visit to the woman's private home could also be perceived as a threatening gesture by local Muslims.

REFORMING THE PONDOKS

5. (C) Chidchai told the Ambassador that the RTG had plans to institute educational reforms in the Southern provinces that would require private Islamic schools to adhere to the national curriculum. He noted that many of these schools were teaching exclusively religious subjects, and were indoctrinating their students with dangerous Islamic fundamentalist ideals. He said that it had been a mistake for the RTG to allow these schools to operate without oversight for so many years. He expressed concern that many students were not learning Thai, English or respect for Thai national institutions. The Ambassador noted that Indonesia had a system that worked fairly well in which the government worked closely with Islamic schools to ensure that all the required elements of the national curriculum were taught alongside the school's religious programs.

ANGER WITH MALAYSIA

6. (C) Chidchai's expressed irritation with Malaysian Foreign

Minister Hamid for his recent statements about the 131 Thais who have crossed into Malaysia to claim refugee status. He believed that the Malaysian Government was "crazy" to turn a minor incident into an issue which could have a damaging long-term effect on Thai-Malaysian relations. He commented that even the Indonesians have taken a more balanced and neutral response to the situation. Chidchai hoped that UNHCR would certify that these people were not refugees.

#### AVIAN INFLUENZA

17. (U) The Ambassador advised that Thailand should continue to prepare itself for the possibility of an avian influenza pandemic. Although Thailand had many safeguards in place to guard against a breakout of avian flu, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam remain highly vulnerable since they do not have the resources to guarantee a sufficient level of protection. Due to the vulnerabilities of its neighbors, rural Thailand was still very much at risk should a pandemic break out. Chidchai concurred with the Ambassador's sentiments.  
BOYCE